

Personal Risk Management

Don't be a Darwin Award winner!

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Naturalist Charles Darwin proposed a theory that only the fittest species survive and others who are unable to adapt die out.

Safety officials must often feel that mankind is traveling the road to extinction. Rules are created to protect people from themselves, though many continue to believe they are the exception to those rules.

The Darwin Awards, an international honor to "those who improve our gene pool by removing themselves from it," is one indication that people haven't caught on to the idea of Operational Risk Management (ORM) yet. ORM, a safety official's mantra, is simply considering the consequences of one's actions to avoid suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous misfortunes.

The following Darwin Award winners didn't practice this simple concept. They were otherwise normal people who boldly put their brains on hold for a few moments and, as a result, won the uncoveted Darwin.

Life and limbs

A British tree trimmer sought to save time by burning old tree limbs at the base of the tree he was trimming. He built a fire and added limbs to the blaze from above — where he sat in the tree. If he had taken a few seconds to evaluate this scenario, he

probably would have used common sense and broken this task down into two distinct, safe processes: cutting the limbs and burning them away from his work area. He didn't.

Can you hear me now?

In Kansas, a man was struck and killed by a train while using his cell phone to call for help after his vehicle broke down. The train engineer spotted him standing on the tracks holding a cell phone to one ear and cupping his hand over the other to keep from being distracted by the inconsiderate noise of a train horn. With time-honored cell phone etiquette, the man remained focused on his call and became locomotive fodder.

Man's best friend

Another award winner in the Ukraine was walking his dog when a police cadet pointed out that dogs in that area must be walked with a muzzle and a leash. The pair began to argue and the man threw a grenade at the cadet's feet. The dog saved the day for the cadet when he fetched the explosive prize and dutifully returned it to his master for the last time.

Clearly, some of these folks are not the sharpest pen-

cils in the drawer, but many of us become candidates for Darwins in our everyday lives.

See someone walking around the base a lot? It's not a new fitness initiative. Despite hearing it weekly, there are some folks who still insist on driving home after drinking at a party. Now they can't drive on base.

Do you ever let your cell phone distract you? Do you drive with only one hand on the wheel while concentrating on that once-in-a-lifetime call home to say you'll be 10 minutes late? Do you believe it's the other drivers' responsibility to watch out for you?

Motorcycles can be a lot of fun when driven safely, but do you prefer to ride without a helmet to feel the wind in your hair? Helmets are required by Department of Defense directives to protect what's left of your brains.

Do you intentionally cut someone off in traffic, or pull out in front of someone in a fit of anger? Do you believe they're rational people who will accept your sound judgment of their driving skills?

Protect yourself by thinking ahead. ORM is a tool that can help you look at the consequences of your actions. You alone have the power to keep yourself from being the recipient of a Darwin Award. ▶

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Photo by TSgt Lisa Zunzanyika

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